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ABSTRACT

This document presents a brief history of the Society of Scribes and describes procedures for the 1-day workshop, master apprenticeship method, of calligraphy instruction. Calligrapher-instructors using this method include: Lili Cassel Wronker, who encourages straight edge pen point exercises; E. J. Carroll, who focuses on the commercial client and artist relationship; and Robert Boyajian, who presents a technique for left handed calligraphers. Calligraphy as an art with practical, vocational applications is advocated. Calligraphy classes at the Art Students League in New York, and Calligraphy Gatherings that incorporate lectures and demonstrations, workshops, and presentations by major scribes are described. The paper concludes with a list of Regional Calligraphy Societies. (MM)

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A TEACHER'S GUIDE TO AMERICAN CALLIGRAPHY: 1983

By

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SO 023 442

A TEACHER'S GUIDE TO AMERICAN CALLIGRAPHY: 1983

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Everyone who pens a letter can be called a scribe, but to call oneself a calligrapher is another story. In 1974, the Society of Scribes of New York City grew from eighteen members to one hundred and seventy, all interested in some aspect of calligraphy and included scribes, artists, calligraphers, illuminators, engrossers, teachers, calligraphiles, and people who had only just heard of the word "calligraphy" and wanted to learn more about it.

The Society's two main areas of concern were information and education about calligraphy and this group sponsored one day workshops, informative meetings, literature about new calligraphic materials and where they could be found, and began a network among organizations here and abroad which had similar concerns. In 1975, there were only five other societies in this field, but since then interest has grown and more than one hundred have been formed in the United States alone. The New York group became a model for other societies, and the first chairman, Paul Freeman wrote a description of how to form a society in one's own area, since he received so many requests for "help".

Today the Society of Scribes is like most of the groups and has an unweildy membershop of over two thousand members. Run by volunteers, most of the groups have had difficulty in keeping track of scheduling, money and membership, and have had to assume professional responsibilities and practises within their organization. This growth of membership reflects the interest in calligraphy as a popular art form similar to macrame and tye-dying some years earlier. Already many critics feel that the interest is declining; but today this art form has many areas of overlapping interest to art educators.

Societies generally limit their wide range of calligraphic interests to the writing done by hand with an edged instrument (reed, brush, quill, metal pen etc.,) for the purpose of aesthetic communication, and when speaking of its relationship to handwriting, mean the methods based on the italic model. When discussing the resources, workshop instruction available and activities in this paper, this definition will be used.

One resource used by all master teachers and students are the excellent books available on calligraphy method and design. Many of the good ones are mentioned in the Bibliography of this paper and are available from the Pentalic Corporation in New York City who will accept orders for these and a good stock of penmanship supplies as well. Although one can order directly from the company if one is a teacher, most art stores in any area of the country will stock the books, ink and supplies for students and ship them upon request. There are also several good mail order suppliers who will serve any person not able to purchase directly from stores.

Workshops

One of the main reasons the Society of Scribes was formed was the concern many people had that the interest in calligraphy and italic handwriting remain alive, since many of the best scribes are over seventy years of age. Now, workshops featuring many of these graphic artists as guest teachers are sponsored by societies who pay well for these calligraphers to come to their areas and present one or two day workshops, or sometimes stay a week and provide instruction. In a single workshop, it is expected that some new calligraphic skill will be taught to the student and enough information is given to him so that he may return to his own desk and be able to immediately apply this information to his graphic design. Several workshops will be discussed here so that the organization and content of them will be understood.

The master apprentice method is the way many major calligraphers have learned and they often practice this approach in their classes. A typical day session such is presented by the workshops of the Society for Scribes lasts six hours. There is a morning three hour instructional period, lunch break and a three hour afternoon laboratory period during the session. Normally a person may actually stay during the afternoon as long as he wishes until he finishes his assignment. Each workshop features one kind of lettering or design problem.

In advance, one is sent a list of supplies and preparation one must make for the session.

Typical Workshop Procedures

When one arrives at the class they select a desk and begin special lettering exercises to prepare them for the laboratory part of their lesson. Ahead of time, the instructor has placed on the bulletin boards reproductions of good work including his own which illustrates the topic of the workshop. Also on a table, books are open and other materials are laid out to be perused and thumbed through during breaks, or when someone needs some inspiration.

An hour of time is normally allowed the instructor to present slides and visual materials, as well as discuss the problem of the lesson. Historical information is included with this material. During the second hour visual examples of the assignment are presented and demonstration takes place. The demonstration is usually performed on a piece of butcher paper stretched in front of, and taped over the blackboard space usually found in the front of most class rooms. For the rest of the session, the student works on his own assignment and the instructor comes around, observes and helps anyone who needs it. Each person on an individual basis receives an ~~individual~~ demonstration or critique by the instructor.

At the end of the six hours a written evaluation can be filled out by the participant which acts as feedback for future workships so that they can improve.

Calligraphy Personalities:

Lili Cassel Wronker

Italic handwriting and letter forms have to be taught by someone who loves to do it, so that the essence of the subject is properly transmitted to the student. The workshop given by Lili Cassel Wronker called "Unicials From A to Z" was a good example of this. This artist has designed book jackets and worked in the commercial field for years. Calligraphers love books and travel the world over to monastaries and libraries to see famous manuscripts or search for new ones. Lili has done this and refers to these trips as a means to communicate her enthusiasm for the subject. Each person was given a printed sheet of the letter shapes as they appear in perfect form and an hour or so was spent practising these letter shapes with her help. She came around and sat down individually to help each with their own particular problems with it. For the first hour she had demonstrated and lectured on the fascinating letter forms and their history.

The students were using the C-3 dip pen and point for the first exercises. The straight edge pen point requires work to master and a good instruction before one can master the alphabets in a satisfactory way. It takes awhile to get the thicks and the thins of the lines to fall in the right place and it is easier to start out with a fairly wide point like the C-3 for the early exercises before switching to the smaller pen point. The student is required to rule out white paper with lines allowing five pen widths to decide the width of each space. Words are then practised with the newly found shapes, after one has practised the alphabet for some time. A quick critical eye of a good teacher can help with placement of words and design on a page.

After one workshop such as the one described, even the beginner can have acquired enough skill to do simple lettering jobs in the alphabet presented, and have some knowledge of how to practice it so he can learn to do it better. There is an amazing amount of carry-over, or transfer of information from learning one alphabet to another, and as one practices the alphabet they become easier and easier to learn.

E.J. Carroll

The workshop led by E.J. Carroll, one of the best calligraphers and advertising artists in New York in the special area of certificate and hand illumination demonstrated the close relationship of the advertising field to lettering. For one hour the artist showed slides of some of the best of his more than twenty-five years of work, which included scrolls and citations for loyalty and major businesses in the United States. He spoke of the psychology of selling to the public which were valuable words of wisdom from a man who has worked his way up from an Italian engraver's apprentice during the Depression who lettered invitations for sixty dollars a week. He claims that it was the early years spent in this master-apprentice situation that taught him much of the skills and information that is the foundation for his success today.

Part of his lecture focused on the business of selling calligraphy and how like in any other form of business you often have to give the public what they want to make your sale, even if the product is not in the best of taste. A good example was shown of a baseball scroll award which he made that seemed to be incongruous in design and interpretation of subject. The club manager had selected a very decorative manuscript style within a heavily embossed border of Florentine flowers to be the form of the scrolls designed for his club. Following the theory that one gives the customer what he asks for, Carroll did the certificate, but felt that he could not refuse to do what his customer requested although he disagreed with the design concept. Knowing how much to give in to the customer desires and how one's own high artistic and aesthetic judgments should

rule the product design, is a balance a commercial designer is often faced with, but one just has to remember that the customer pays the bill.

Carroll has very little time for lectures and workshops, so hearing a person such as him truthfully discussing motivations and business tactics is rare. This is also a good example of how to use a professional as a guest artist for a one day workshop in a way that can make the subject more meaningful. It is interesting to note that a calligrapher with a reputation like his can earn as high as fifteen hundred dollars for one piece of work and take over a week to complete a scroll or certificate. During his workshop he demonstrated how to letter a simple certificate for an organization or award and he spent some time talking with each student about his own particular interest in the field.

Robert Boyajian

A workshop was held for students who were "lefties" and for teachers who struggle with the problems of teaching left handed students. Robert Boyajian, a self taught, left handed commercial artist who writes in a beautiful italic was featured during the six hour session. Working with a flat pen or oblique point with various alphabets is hard for the left handed person, and special knowledge of their problems must be considered in the strategy of teaching a "lefty" by every teacher. Building self confidence when somebody is starting to learn a skill is extremely important and since the way writing is taught in schools is directed toward the right handed majority, the "lefties" suffer. It is not surprising to find, therefore, that Boyajian is self taught and experienced years of frustration as a child when he was exposed to the argument of his teachers that it was a right handed world we live in and that he should learn to write with his right hand.

He pointed out to the class that by being self taught, his ideosyncracies should not be thought of as a standard method for using the flat edge pen for people who were left handed. He hoped to inspire those who were "lefties" by his demonstration and perhaps provide them with some pointers. Turning his paper

thirty degrees or more and working generally at a tilted desk, his ways of forming letters were very different from the standard right handed approach for rendering each letter. His philosophy included surrounding himself with good examples and "anything you can do to make your letter work is o.k...." He does not use the special pen point sold for "lefties" known as the left oblique as much as one would think, but reserved it primarily for Roman letters, and instead used the straight across flat pen point, generally used by right handed calligraphers.

As a method of demonstrating to students, he sat at a regular tilted desk in the center of the room and demonstrated with a wide C-0 flat edged pen point in a holder, while the twenty-six students crowded around. Finding it hard to maintain the right angle for the letter rhythm necessary, he often ruled his lines and with a triangle, lightly pencilled in the angle as a series of lines where the letters will be printed which can be erased later. Of special interest was the way he joined letters, since he had great trouble with this. He usually left his letters separated and after finishing them turned the paper ninety degrees and then added the joins, paying special attention to see that a rhythmic design sense was achieved.

Of special interest to a teacher who is right handed was the chance to observe and see that hardly anything carries over in method of pen angles and procedures of lettering for the right handed to the left handed student. It seemed an almost "anything goes" approach, as long as good letter forms and mastery of the straight edge pen was achieved by the "leftie".

Art Schools Providing Calligraphy Instruction

In New York City, most art schools teach some kind of a calligraphy course as an elective. A good example of this is found at the Art Students League and will be described here. Others can often be found listed through newsletters from societies in various areas of the country and by contacting the local university or art school art departments.

Martin Oberstein and Eleanor Winters teach evening workshops at the Art Students League, as well as at several other major art schools in the city. Oberstein is a small individual who maintains discipline and quiet during his teaching. The students sit at tilted desks and he lectures and demonstrates for two hours at the front of the room on large sheets of paper stretched out and taped over the blackboard area. He uses a wide felt tip marker and ruled sheets for the demonstrations, and intersperses his lectures with humor and relative details.

During one of the classes I attended, a sheet with the assignment reproduced on it was handed out. This plate can be taken home to study and shows the letter forms featured during the demonstration and the pen angles. This evening the group was starting the italic writing which is derived from Black Letter Early English writing. The chancery cursive hand reached the height of beauty in the middle of the sixteenth century and some of the history was verbally interspersed with the demonstration. This particular script was to be studied over a six week period and Oberstein had broken down learning into six sessions: 1. Introduction to lower case letters 2. Joins. 3. Swatching. 4. Caps 5. Lower case 6. Swatch caps.

He introduced vocabulary such as words like "sidling" and explained his own tricks to remembering how to form the letters with poetic metaphors. He made a "dagger x" and a "bird's beak d". His are some of the clearest explanations of how to make these letters that I have ever heard. He gave special attention to the "Lefties", since several of the latter had attended the Boyajian lecture described earlier and he reminded them that this man was self taught and did not necessarily demonstrate the only or the best way to form letters.

His Art Student League classes only last two hours which means being several hours shorter than the usual workshop sessions; it is necessary for the students to do more homework to keep up. The students are expected to concentrate more on their exercises outside of class. His humor and an intelligent personality conveyed the assignments in a patient way and are all good qualities of the teacher of calligraphy.

Calligraphic Gatherings

Two years ago, a new kind of art conference appeared which has developed into yearly international gatherings of scribes. The first one in Minnesota, "The Calligraphy Connection" had more than four hundred people attend, and included a week of study and fun featuring Scribe to her Majesty's Crown Office, Donald Jackson. During one week, it was possible to learn quill cutting, various alphabets and become introduced to the art of illumination by following Jackson's morning instruction in how to copy a small illuminated letter from a manuscript on to a piece of vellum. Films, book reviews, discussions and varied workshops filled out the week's activity from early morning to late at night and appealed to scribes of any age.

Last year, three calligraphy gatherings occurred, the biggest one being the Philadelphia Conference of the Calligraphic Arts in June, which was housed on the University of Pennsylvania campus and had its classroom headquarters at the Philadelphia College of Art. It also included a pot pourri of workshops, lectures and demonstrations from which to choose and a continual source of lively fellowship with other scribes from throughout the world.

Letter Arts Newport last Summer featured the combination of a historic and beautiful art mecca in Rhode Island with the expertise of major scribes from that area including Kay Atkins, John Benson, Raphawl Boguslav, Howard Glasser, John Hegnauer and Alexander Nesbitt.

This was held at the Portsmouth Abbey School in Portsmouth, Rhode Island. Attended by fifty-five scribes, this meant that there was plenty of individual attention by the teachers to the problems and interests of each scribe. It featured six full days of classes, evening programs and trips to local artist's studios, libraries and even cemetaries to look at grave stone carving. This program will not be repeated during the summer of '83 but may occur in '84.

For people living in the southwest, Ghost Ranch is the setting for an annual "Literally Arts Seminar" to be held again in '83. In its fourth year, the emphasis is also on individual attention, as well as developing an appreciation for the lettering arts. The areas of Ghost Ranch in northern New Mexico provides swimming, horseback riding and other forms of recreation which is available for relaxation to make this a very magical week of calligraphic study.

The 1983 international lettering Arts conference is called "Chicago Calligraphy '83" and will be held from July 9 to July 16 at Lake Forest College, outside of Chicago. There will be a special emphasis on the handwritten book and courses will demonstrate all phases of the book arts and related calligraphy. Many scribes have not attempted the handwritten book, and the purpose of this conference is to make this unique project accessible to even the most inexperienced calligraphers.

It is easy to see that in 1983, calligraphy is a very popular art form and so it is important for art educators to be knowledgable about it. It has many practical applications including that of a vocational direction and at all levels of education through professional art school instruction, instructors need to be aware of its application to their curriculums. Writing is a living art, and calligraphy, or "beautiful writing" is an area that must not be overlooked.

REGIONAL CALLIGRAPHY SOCIETIES

WEST

Colorado Calligraphers Guild
1846 S. Williams St.
Denver, CO 80210

Friends of Calligraphy
P.O. Box 5194
San Francisco, CA 94101

Society For Calligraphy
P.O. Box 64174
Sos Angeles, CA 90064

NORTHWEST

The Alquin Society
P.O. Box 94108
Richmond, British Columbia,
Canada V6Y 2A2

British Columbia Branch of
The Society for Italic Handwriting
Box 48390, Bentall Centre
Vancouver, British Columbia
Canada V7X 1A2

Calligraphers Guild
P.O. Box 304
Ashland, OR 97520

Capital Calligraphers
3589 Pringle Rd., S.E.
Salem, OR 97302

Fairbank Society for Italic
Handwriting and Calligraphy
4578 Hughes Rd., R.R. 3
Mrs. Esme Davis
Victoria, British Columbia,
Canada V8X 3X1

Goose Quill Club
Oregon State University
Corvallis, OR 97330

Society for Calligraphy
and Handwriting
311-12 Avenue East
Seattle, WA 98102

Valley Calligraphy Society
3241 Kevington
Eugene, OR 97405

Western American Brance of
The Society For Italic Handwriting
6800 S.E. 32nd Ave.
Portland, OR 97202

Write-On Calligraphers
7929 196th S.W. #5
Edmonds, WA 98020

NORTHEAST

Handwriters Guild of Toronto
60 Logandale Rd.
Willowdale, Ontario, Canada

International Assn. of Master Penmen
and Teachers of Handwriting
c/o Eileen Richardson
34 Broadway Ave.
Ottawa, Ontario, Canada K1S 2V6

EAST

Chautauqua Calligraphers Guild
R.R. Box 321, R.F.D. Rt. 380
Jamestown, NY 14701

The Lettering Arts Guild of Boston
80 Chestnut St., #3
Brookline, MASS 02146

Philadelphia Calligraphers Society
P.O. Box 7174
Elkins Park, PA 19117

Society of Scribes
P.O. Box 933
New York, NY 10150

Tidewater Calligraphy Guild
303 Oaklette Dr.
Chesapeake, VA 23325

Calligraphers of Maine
P.O. Box 2751
South Portland, Maine 04106

Calligraphy Guild of Pittsburgh
Box 8167
Pittsburgh, PA 15217

REGIONAL CALLIGRAPHY SOCIETIES

Southeastern Massachusetts Letterworks
Prof. Howard Glasser, Design Dept.
Southeastern Massachusetts University
North Dartmouth, Massachusetts 02747

Washington Calligraphers Guild
Box 23813
Washington, DC 20024

INTERNATIONAL

Society of Scribes and Illuminators
c/o FBCS
43 Earham St.
London WC 2H 9LD, England

Handwriters Guild of Toronto
60 Logandale Rd.
Willowdale, Ontario Canada

Society for Italic Handwriting
Mrs. Fiona Sturdy
69 Arlington Rd.
London, N.W. 1, England 7ES

Japan Penmanship Assoc.
Tadaichi NIWA
43 Sakuramichi
Adadohjicho
Kohnan City 483 Japan

SOUTH

Friends of Calligraphy in Houston
Ramona Spain
1922 Strawberry,
Pasadena, Texas 77502

San Antonio Calligraphic Guild
2407 Shadow Cliff
San Antonio, TX 78232

New Orleans Calligraphers Assn.
6161 Marguette Pl.
New Orleans, LA 70715

Carolina Lettering Arts Society
P.O. Box 18122
Asheville, NC 28814

South Florida Calligraphy Guild
2360 NE 211 St.
North Miami, Beach,
Florida 33180

MIDWEST

St. Louis Calligraphy Guild
8541 Douglas Court
Brentwood, MO 63144

Colleagues of Calligraphy
P.O. Box 4024
St. Paul, MN 55105

Indianapolis Scribes
1712 E. 86th St.
Indianapolis, Indiana 46240

Chicago Calligraphy Collective
P.O. Box 11333
Chicago, IL 60611

Indiana Calligraphers Guild
P.O. Box 194
New Albany, IN 47150

Kentucky Calligraphers Guild
2214 Cherian Dr.
Louisville, KY 40299

Western Reserve Calligraphers
2596 Fenwich Rd.
Cleveland, OH 44116

SOUTHWEST

Calligraphers Society of Arizona
P.O. Box 27695
Tempe, AZ 85282

Escribiente
P.O. Box 26718
Albuquerque, NM 87125

Calligraphy Guild of Amarillo
c/o Anne Gregory
Art Dept., Box 207, WT Station
West Texas State University
Canyon, TX 79016

International Association of
Masterpenmen and Teachers of
Handwriting
2213 Arlington, Ave
Middletown, Ohio 45042